

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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Managing conflicts at work

Boost team performance by
resolving interpersonal differences

HOW many times have you encountered difficult colleagues whom you just can't see eye to eye with? How often do you get into unhappy disagreements with peers, subordinates or even your bosses? How many times have you left a job because of interpersonal conflicts and office politics?

If you are a human resource manager, a department head, a team leader or in any leadership position within your organisation, chances are that you spend a significant percentage of your time resolving people issues within your team.

Interpersonal conflicts and office politics result in employee dissatisfaction and lower productivity at work. Wouldn't it be great if interpersonal conflicts and people issues were reduced to the minimum? Every team member would be able to work happily and there would be greater work satisfaction and enhanced productivity.

Let's take a look at the seven causes of interpersonal conflicts and office politics:

1) Differing beliefs and values

People are shaped by their past experiences, beliefs and values, and growing up in different environments, it is only natural that their beliefs and values differ from one another. As beliefs and values are what people hold dearly to, they

may disagree with the opposing beliefs and behaviours of their colleagues. Thus, conflicts occur.

2) Differing expectations

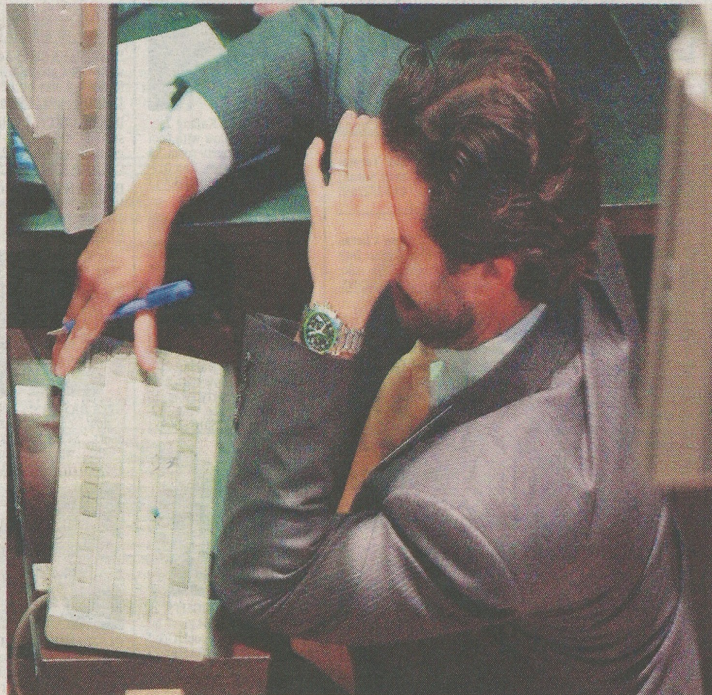
As people have different beliefs and values, they also expect things to be done differently. In their minds, they have "blueprints" of how things should be handled and managed. Should a colleague speak and behave in a manner that is incongruous with their "blueprints", they start to judge him. When they stereotype a person, it becomes easy to find fault with him.

3) Differing objectives and interests

Almost everyone holds a job for the core reason of earning money. However, people take on the same job with different objectives and interests. Some people want to have a brilliant career and go the extra mile, while others just want to make a living and only do what is required. Some people focus on the collective interests of their team, while others place their personal interests first.

4) Differing needs and priorities

People arrive at the same organisation with different needs. Some are looking to fulfil their need for significance and thus, proactively get into the good books of their bosses and take the lead in projects;



If interpersonal conflicts and people issues can be reduced, it would lead to greater work satisfaction and enhanced productivity.

others want to fulfil their need for security and diligently work on what they have to deliver and remain low-profile.

Some staff place their family as a priority, but their managers value career more importantly and frown upon them leaving work on time or taking time off for the children.

5) Differing "modes of operation"

According to Neuro-Linguistic Programming, people receive and process information and events differently in their brains and thus "operate" differently. Some people communicate visually and say, "I hope you can see my point", while others communicate kinaesthetically and solicit feedback by saying, "Do you get a sense of what I'm trying to say?"

These different modes of operation are akin to different personalities or speaking two different languages. When two different modes come together, miscommunication can take place and result in conflict.

6) Psychological transference

As human beings, people unconsciously judge others by their own standards of behaviour. During their childhood and teenage years, they may have had unresolved negative

emotions towards some people in their lives. When they grow up, they carry these into their personal and workplace relationships.

So when a colleague says something or behaves in a way that reminds others of a particular person from their past that they feel negatively towards, they tend to project the same negative emotion to that colleague and judge him in a similar way. This transfer of emotions can escalate into interpersonal conflicts.

7) Lack of emotional intelligence

As emotions play a huge role in fuelling interpersonal conflicts, someone who lacks emotional intelligence and is unable to manage his emotions can get into conflicts with colleagues easily.

Driven by negative emotions, differing views can escalate into open arguments, sabotage and destructive office politics.

Having identified the seven reasons behind interpersonal conflicts, let's discuss briefly what can be done to resolve them at a transformational level:

Empower minds

Help staff to discover themselves so that they understand why they

think, feel and behave the way they do today.

With this understanding, there will be more empathy among colleagues. Encourage everyone to take personal responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, speech, behaviours, performance and results.

Empower hearts

With staff taking personal responsibility for their own emotions and behaviour, empower them with emotion-mastery methodologies and techniques to deal with their negative emotions as they arise.

The key here is to face and resolve the emotions, not suppress or pretend they do not exist. The latter will result in destructive team dynamics and undesirable team performance.

■ Article by Jensen Siaw, founder and principal personal empowerment trainer of SPEAK For Life Training. As an executive coach and personal empowerment coach, he has empowered people from different backgrounds and age groups to achieve greater success. – Singapore Straits Times / Asia News Network